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Edward H. Hall

AN ADDRESS

GIVEN IN THE CHURCH OF THE SECOND PARISH
WORCESTER, APRIL 14, 1912

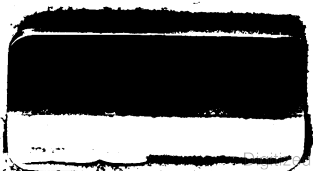
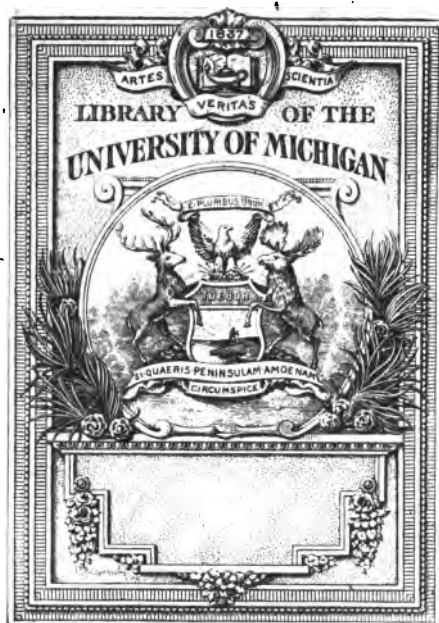
By

AUSTIN S. GARVER

Minister Emeritus



WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS
1913



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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Edward Henry Hall was born at Cincinnati, Ohio, April 16, 1831, the elder son of Rev. Edward Brooks Hall and Harriet (Ware) Hall, while the father was temporarily supplying the Unitarian pulpit at Cincinnati. He was fitted for college in the High School in Providence, while his father was settled there as pastor of the First Congregational Church. He entered Harvard College in 1847, sixteen years old, during the presidency of Edward Everett. He was graduated from college with the class of 1851, in the presidency of Jared Sparks; and from the Harvard Divinity School in 1855.

Mr. Hall was ordained at Plymouth, Mass., January 5, 1859, where he remained as minister over the Unitarian Church for eight years, until July, 1867. During his ministry at Plymouth he was chaplain of the 44th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Militia in active service in the War of Secession. He was settled at Worcester, Mass., over the Second Parish (Unitarian), February 10, 1869, in his thirty-eighth year; and remained there as pastor for thirteen years. Being invited by the First Parish in Cambridge, Mass. (Unitarian), to become its minister, he was installed as pastor over this First Parish and Church on March 30, 1882, where he remained till his resignation was accepted, March 31, 1893. He was lecturer on the History of Christian Doctrine at the Harvard Divinity School for the year 1899-1900, and was given the degree of S. T. D. at Harvard in 1902.

Mr. Hall wrote the following books: "Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Christian Church," 1874, while in Worcester; "Lessons on the Life of St. Paul," 1885, and "Discourses," 1893, while pastor at Cambridge; "Papias and his Contem-

poraries," 1899, and "Paul the Apostle," 1906, after retiring from the settled ministry.

Mr. Hall belonged to many organizations other than churches, and among them are the following: The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Antiquarian Society, the American Unitarian Association, the 44th Massachusetts Regiment Association, the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the U. S. A., the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Massachusetts Reform Club, the Worcester Art Society, the Worcester Continentals, the Worcester School Committee, for several years. He died at his home, 14 Craigie Street, Cambridge, on Thursday, February 22, 1912, and was buried at Mt. Auburn, February 25, 1912.

JAMES GREEN.

ADDRESS

The Tongue of the Wise is Health.—Prov. 12, 18.

To be able to apply these words, without a sense of unfitness, to a life that is finished, is to give it high praise. To be able to say of one whose office was that of a teacher, that he was wise, that he knew what to say and how to say it well, to say that the effect of his life-long teaching was health, that is the strengthening and purification of mind and spirit, is to pronounce the loftiest and truest eulogium we could give or he desire. And the hour which was consecrated by the memory of such a life, especially if it had personal relations with your own, would have no trace of sorrow in it, but would be filled with a quiet spirit of pride and joy. What other sentiment would be appropriate in the presence of a manly soul and its accomplished task? It is, if I interpret the occasion right, these mingled feelings of gratitude and affection that are uppermost in your hearts to-day. You do not come to this service of commemoration to lament, but to remember and be glad in the memory of the beauty and strength of a noble life.

This attitude, I am sure, is the one that best accords with his spirit. His own words in regard to

these personal losses should remind us of this. "The hurrying ranks of those who work and live," he says in a sermon on Our Dead, "cannot pause at the graves of the fallen for idle grief, but catch up their lives into their own, and press forward for the higher and larger tasks which their lives have made possible. The men of one generation but make the path of the next, if not more splendid, yet richer in meaning and fuller of possibilities. Our best homage is paid in calm recognition of what the departed have been and done. What each generation asks of the next is to prove the value of its work already done, by carrying it forward without delay, if need be in wider and loftier ways."

When Mr. Hall came to this Parish in 1869, at the age of thirty-seven, he was in the full maturity of his powers. He had made his youthful experiments in thought and life, if indeed there were any that can be so described, in a previous pastorate with the First Parish of Plymouth. Steeped in the finest New England traditions, gifted with a penetrating and resolute mind, trained in the best schools, and enriched by an experience of tremendous realities as chaplain of the Forty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment in the civil war, he was well equipped for the difficult duties that lay before him. Now it was a conflict of a different order that summoned him. He knew the nature of the field, he understood himself and his place in it, and he knew what for him were

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the orders of the day. With what courage he performed the service laid upon him, with what cheerful obedience to the Great Commander, it will be part of my purpose to show, though I have neither the competence nor the knowledge to do this adequately.

The mid-nineteenth century was not a happy time for the liberal preacher. The earlier biblical and creedal liberalism still held sway in most of our churches, as it did in our own. The harsher doctrines had been exchanged for milder, but the basis of belief remained much the same. Meanwhile floods of light were let in on these questions from scientific and historical studies which demanded new interpretations and especially fresh search for the foundations of reality. There was much confusion, and timidity. The old landmarks were disappearing, old sanctions were losing their authority. Men inquired if anything would be left. The answer was, all that is remains; nothing has been lost except what is illusory. But after all something precious had gone or was threatened and the loss or fear was full of pain.

So the lines were drawn, with equally earnest and sincere men on either side. You can see from this hint how vital were the points in debate, and how near they lay to the most sacred emotions and convictions. The old order of the miraculous and the supernatural was dying in pain, and the new order in which life is the miracle and nature the supernatural

was in the pangs of birth. It was the early stage of that transition in Christian Theology of which we have not yet seen the end.

Something of this you must have in mind, if you would understand the difficulty of his position, or appreciate the fearless and gentle wisdom, the loving and considerate spirit and the unfailing courtesy and tact, which marked the delivery of his message. For him the past was gone: its religious expressions were not adequate to contain the larger thought of life and God and duty. For many in his congregation whom he most respected, the familiar ideas and phrases were infinitely dear and satisfying. Under such conditions it would be too much to expect and more than the truth would warrant, to say that there was a complete understanding from the first. Yet so evident was his sincerity, so profound and reverent were his convictions, that he soon had the entire confidence of his parishioners. To his relations with them might be applied the words he spoke in praise of the magnanimity of his beloved predecessor. "That I was following methods and ideas unlike his own and approaching the great truths of religion from another point, seemed to cause him no uneasiness, and has cost me, I am sure, no word of sympathy which would otherwise have been mine. Provided he had always found honesty of purpose on my part, and a love of truth, I cannot believe that anything could have disturbed the harmony of our intercourse."

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Mr. Hall was fortunate in having a people who were accustomed to think and weigh evidence, and little by little his impressive utterance had its effect and drew men to his side in loyal and admiring support. Of this phase of his life and its success it is sufficient to add that when at the end of thirteen years he decided to accept the invitation of the First Parish in Cambridge, he left a sorrowing church behind him; he went away in spite of the entreaties and amid the tears of all, old and young. If we, as a church, have come out into a liberty beyond doctrinal controversy, if we have in a measure attained to a faith above the assaults of doubt, if we are enabled to distinguish between the opinions of good men and the foundations of reality, if we have learned to discern some of the sacred meanings of a world in which God resides, and to feel that the place whereon we stand is holy ground, for that boon we are indebted in generous measure to the third minister of the Parish and to those who by their faith and confidence encouraged and sustained him.

If I were to attempt an estimate of his character I should place first an unswerving love of truth combined with perfect intellectual sobriety. He held that the truth necessary for us was within the reach of our faculties, and its materials furnished in the facts and laws of life. He laid great emphasis on the action of the mind as one of the chief elements of the religious life. Yet his position was thoroughly modest

and reverent, there was nothing in it of presumption or vanity. Here we are in a world of wonderful order, meaning and beauty. What has it to say to us, of what does it testify? The duty of the soul is it not to observe, listen, understand and obey, and so come into harmony with the divine purpose and will?

"The trouble with our religious thinking," he says, "is that we are so impatient with the position in which we are placed. We are not content to regard ourselves creatures of the earth looking at things from an earthly standpoint. We are here and from here we must start. We must climb our ladder from the bottom to the top. We must hold fast to our solid facts and not despise them. We must prefer our facts to all the dreams of cloudland. We must honor them with that reverence which belongs to everything which comes from God." At bottom, what is this but the humility of spirit which accepts this as a divine world; and just because it is divine it will have its mysteries and its barriers for our keenest intelligence, but will also offer support for all the yearnings and aspirations, the hopes and trusts of the soul.

It is said of Cardinal Newman that he stopped short of that purest faith which demands no revelation, and is dependent on no logic, but is content within itself. That purest faith was in him whose life we recall to-day. Of him it might have been written "Blessed are they that have not seen and

yet have believed." He was strong enough to hold to the actual facts of life and to discern his vision of peace quite apart from them. In an era which assailed men with unanswerable doubt, he could lift his faith to those serene certainties which are their own confirmation. He could accept every limitation of our knowledge and yet rise above it.

I have dwelt at length upon this point, because it is central to an understanding of him and his work, yet I cannot leave it without adding a few quotations to show how he looked upon the function of the preacher. "If the people have any claims upon their spiritual guide, it is to know his inmost soul on sacred themes, not what the past has delivered to him, nor what the present expects him to say, but what he thinks and feels." "Do not ask to have your own ideas reflected back to you, do not ask that the preacher shall echo the regulation phrases even upon the highest themes." "Truth lies, we may be sure, in no middle ground between existing creeds, but somewhere above and beyond them all. However it may be with others, for us there is but one path, the path of unfaltering sincerity."

In such words we seem to catch the very tones of his strong, vibrant voice. In them he strikes the dominant chord of his whole life to which everything in him responded, and we gain a glimpse of those ideals of personal integrity and ministerial duty to which he was ever faithful.

As a preacher he was not emotional, neither was he coldly intellectual. His style was singularly clear and simple, and his language was warmed with the emotion of high spiritual thought. He had none of the arts of the popular speaker, but his sermons and lectures were greatly appreciated by thoughtful persons. He was a careful student and made important contributions to religious literature. His work in our Sunday School, where he was particularly happy in his relations with the children and young people, resulted in a little manual on the New Testament which was a model of its kind.

Dignified and courtly in bearing, he made the impression on those who did not know him well as being cold and reserved, but he was the most genial of companions and the most sympathetic of friends. One might say there was something aristocratic in his fine culture and taste, but in his deep human sympathies, especially with the suffering, and the victims of wrong and injustice, he was truly democratic. Stern he may have been with himself, he was never harsh or militant towards others. Firm in his own views, he was not aggressive or dogmatic in proclaiming them. He had great charity for all forms of sincere belief, however widely they differed from his own. It was these genuinely sympathetic elements of his nature that gave power to his word, and won for him the admiration of those who could not follow him.

Possessed of rare refinement and sensitiveness of spirit he shrank from many of the coarse contacts of life. It was impossible for him to stoop to the shifty ideals deemed essential in practical affairs. For the common human failings his charity was un-failing, but for the meaner sins of hypocrisy and greed, of self-seeking and parasitism no words were too scorching to express his scorn and indignation. On the other hand he was free and at home in the realm of ideal and spiritual beauty. Here, as among his intimate friends, he found the solace and companionship of a life that was after all somewhat lonely. It was through his interest, that the first movements in art were fostered here in Worcester. His lectures in our vestry, his encouragement in the formation of the Art Society, marked the beginning of what has become an important and established institution.

I realize the imperfections of the sketch I have tried to make. If it does not fail altogether you must feel how rare and attractive is the personality suggested by it. What a combination of strength and gentleness! Where shall we look for a more knightly courage or a more saintly consecration to the loftiest ideals. Truth, righteousness, beauty, these were the stars that shone brightest for him, and with the divinest radiance. Where they guided the way, he was content, in perfect readiness and humility to follow. We recall his image because of his connection with this church, and of his place in our hearts. We

